



What is Value?

Invitation to a Socratic Dialogue

Background - why a dialog about value in Stockholm?

In conjunction with the construction of an additional railway-tunnel-system in Stockholm, a risk assessment of the building related art and religious artefacts related to buildings had to be undertaken in which value played a central role. The assessment of value for such building related artefacts was separate from values related to the building as an entirety. This approach was an important tool in the City-line project for prioritizing the risks which should be mitigated, and to which extent should the objects (values) be monitored. This focus on the value assessment of artefacts in a building, but also on objects in general, is an important and critical part in making conservation decisions and in the management of collections of (building related) art and objects of cultural heritage.

Date: 2013-12-11

Time: 16.00 to 18.00

Location: Eastmansvägen 29, Stockholm

Session chairman: Dr. W. (Bill) Wei, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Assisted by: Anna Henningsson, Disent AB, Stockholm

Do we know what is valuable?

In the conservation and cultural heritage world, there are many initiatives to help define what and why preserving cultural heritage is so important. This discourse is all the more important, given that one of the most important contemporary issues facing conservators is the effect of the economic crisis and cost cutting on conservation as a whole.

- what is the **value** of cultural heritage in this day and age,
- how does one determine what is **worth** conserving, and
- why should cultural heritage be conserved, that is, why is conservation and what is **valuable**.

These and other questions concerning the term “value” have a wide variety of answers depending on the context in which the word is used.

A discussion is therefore proposed centered on the question, “What is value?” In particular, it is proposed that this discussion be held in the form of a so-called Socratic dialogue. This is a structured form of dialogue in which all participants actively contribute. The purpose of the dialogue is not to solve the question at hand, that is, specifically define what value is, but to investigate each other’s experience and opinions related to value, and to try to determine the essence behind the word.

What is it that cultural heritage professionals are concerned about when they ask and talk about value? What is the essence of the word? The Socratic dialogue will help the participants understand what is behind the **notion of value**, so that they can better formulate arguments to convince people to continue to support preservation efforts throughout the country and abroad.

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“Value” as the topic for the dialogue

The choice of value as the topic for the dialogue is based on the results of a Socratic dialogue in The Netherlands last November, and on e-mail discussions with professionals since then. The Dutch dialogue posed the question, roughly translated, “Restoration: perception, decisions and treatments. We do it well in The Netherlands ... don’t we?” Over 50 professionals with seven different job descriptions (e.g. art historians, conservators, curators, etc.) took part in that dialogue. The goal was to discover the essential questions behind this question.

A number of questions on various aspects of conservation ethics were developed, but the word “value” was an important common denominator for many questions. There are many different ways in which value can be interpreted, and how it affects work and funding. Value also plays a role in, among others, conservation education, and the essence behind controversies in many countries over the question of the certification of conservators.

The topic of value is proposed as the most appropriate for an initial dialogue on Swedish cultural heritage. It is a critical issue in contemporary conservation policy, and the dialogue is expected to result in further important questions, which can be treated in further dialogues.

The workshop

Generally speaking, a Socratic dialogue is generally carried out over a whole day to give all participants the time and space for a good dialogue. This allows for more “free space” for participants to get to know each other, and to have time to think and *reflect* during the dialogue. However, given that the Socratic dialogue is a new concept for many, a shorter half-day session would also be a possibility, whose success would lead to longer dialogues in the future.

A Socratic dialogue is conducted in groups of eight participants. The core of the dialogue is conducted in five rounds of approximately 45 minutes as follows (what is shown is a so-called “question behind the question” dialogue).

About the organizer

Disent AB is a company acting in the field of technical art history, documentation and conservation planning. We encourage creation of dialogues and sharing of findings in cultural heritage. Our aim is to find sustainably preservation solutions for architectural integrated art.